

All Saints' Day

In the early Christian traditions, All Saints' Day was a day for religious leaders to honor those titled "saints" and those who had passed on from their early life into their eternal life. However, more recently, the Reformed church looks at saints and ordinary lives a little differently—all are important, all are part of God's family, and all are to be celebrated. Now, on November 1, All Saints' Day is a day we celebrate believers of every time. It's often a day we honor the faithful who have died during the past year in our own church communities. It's a day of gratefulness for those that have passed away who shared their faith with us, and a time to reflect on how we can continue to share our faith with others. Expanding the idea of saints to include those who are still living in our midst has also become a common practice in many faith traditions. In other words, the term "saint" can include those who have died or are still alive who impact our lives and our faith.

After introducing All Saints' Day, here are some ideas to celebrate the faith of our saints with your youth group:

StoryCorps

Both <http://storycorps.org/> and the StoryCorps app on smartphones provide easy ways to listen to others' stories and record your own stories.

- Invite people in your congregation from a variety of ages and backgrounds to participate. Make sure there are enough participants that you can pair 2 or 3 youth with each invited person.
- Start by listening to one story together as a group. Find one ahead of time on storycorps.org that provides a good story in a few minutes. One great story you can search for is, "If We Left, They Wouldn't Have Nobody" by Maurice Rowland and Miguel Alvarez. It is only 2.28 minutes.
- Brainstorm what made that story a good story. Here are some questions to consider:
 - Was it too long, too short, or just right?
 - Who was in the story?
 - What was communicated?
 - What emotions were felt?
 - What was the tone?
 - Was it general or specific?
 - How is it a story of faith and/or love?
- Split into breakout groups of 3 or 4 with one invited guest, other youth, and youth leaders. Use computers or smartphones so there is no noise in the background. Use StoryCorps' "Helpful Hints" to prepare to interview each other about a story. You can pick a theme like love or faith, or merely ask people to share one story they feel compelled to tell.
- Once the stories are told and recorded, come back to the whole group and share a favorite part of the experience, what you learned, and how the stories communicate our faith, even if they do not directly relate to faith.

Cards

Create cards to send to those in your congregation, school, or other communities who have lost a family member or close friend this year.

- Begin by reading Revelation 21:3–8 (CEB) as a way to remember what God’s ultimate promise of hope is for all the saints—both the living and the departed.

I heard a loud voice from the throne say, “Look! God’s dwelling is here with humankind. He will dwell with them, and they will be his peoples. God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more. There will be no mourning, crying, or pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” Then the one seated on the throne said, “Look! I’m making all things new.” He also said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” Then he said to me, “All is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will freely give water from the life-giving spring. Those who emerge victorious will inherit these things. I will be their God, and they will be my sons and daughters.

- Ask the group: Which words stood out to you in this passage?
- How does this passage reveal hope for those who lost a loved one this year? For us?
- Have labels and cards to decorate and write to families who have lost someone in the last year.
- Have youth write the words that stood out to them from the passage of Revelation in the card to remind the families of God’s hope.

Youngest Saints

Have youth serve and care for the youngest saints in your church or community.

- On All Saints’ Day, volunteer and lead games in your church nursery.
- Have youth teach a lesson about All Saints’ Day during your children’s ministry.
- Have youth plan and participate in a service project with your church’s children. Another adaptation would be to make the service project intergenerational by inviting saints of all ages.
- Find a nonprofit organization that works with children—the Boys and Girls Clubs, an afterschool program, Ronald McDonald House, or a children’s hospital—and have youth volunteer there.

Older Saints

Have youth spend meaningful time with the older saints in your church or community.

- Identify older adults in your congregation that might benefit from youth helping around their homes by raking fall leaves or pulling Christmas decorations out of storage. Send teams of youth and chaperones to their homes to serve and spend time with these saints.

- Visit an assisted-living community or nursing home. Plan a fun event for youth and those living there to get to know one another, play together, sing together, and enjoy each other’s company.
- Have youth write a “church update” to homebound members who haven’t been to church in a while. Youth can share what has been going on to reconnect them in the life of the church.

Closing

Close any of these All Saints’ Day celebrations with a prayer in which a leader voices the prayer and all can participate by naming specific people and “saints” in their lives during the silent times provided by the leader.

God, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end,
 You are with us always and of all times.
 Help us to see all people as the saints and look for you in all of our lives.
 On this All Saints’ Day, we ask for prayers for our youngest saints . . .
silence

We ask for prayers for our oldest saints . . .
silence

We ask for prayers for our saints that are no longer with us . . .
silence

We ask for prayers for saints in this church . . .
silence

We ask for prayers for our saints in this room . . .
silence

We are grateful, God, that you call us yours. In your name, we pray. Amen.

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